Acorn

ISSUE 22 CHRISTMAS 1991

NEWS LETTER

Merry Christmas

I suspect many of you share with me the conflict in feeling that another year appears to have shot past so quickly in some regards, while in other respects it has been a long hard slog in what has turned out to be the worst general recession to hit the personal computer industry since its foundation.

You have every right to feel weary from all the efforts you have put in this year, but please remember that you have every right also to feel pleased by your achievements.

Despite the general economic downturn, we have held our position in those markets where we already had a presence, such as the UK education and consumer markets, and have achieved growth in some of our newer ventures, such as Australia, New Zealand and Value Added Solutions. While doing this, we have maintained our development activity, and in the A5000 have launched what I believe to be one of the best computers we have ever introduced, and one which gives us excellent opportunities in 1992 and beyond to continue our growth.

While achieving the above, you have all contributed to that housekeeping and cost control which is essential in tight times and which allows us to go out of this very tough year in better shape than we came into it.

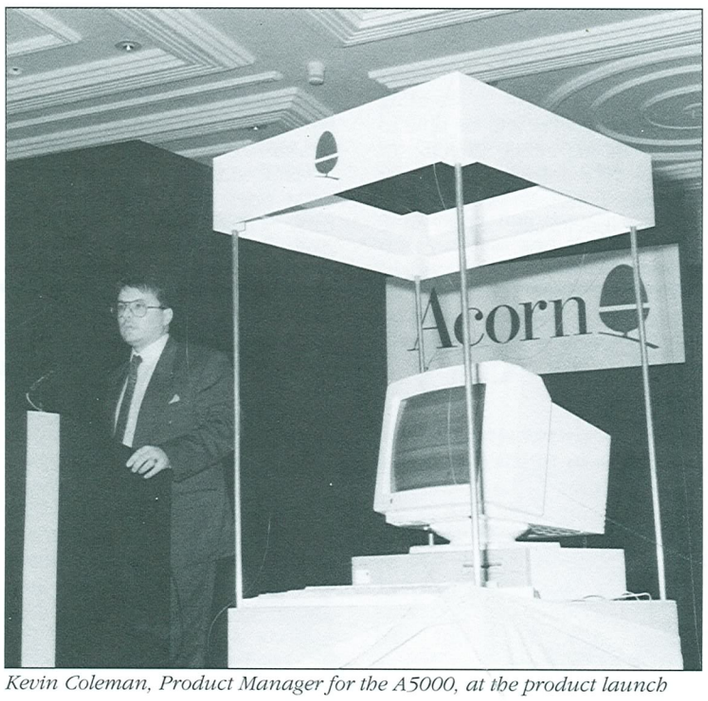
So thank you all for your efforts, loyalty and commitment and please pass my thanks also to your families, who I know have in many cases borne the brunt of the inconvenience when it's been 'all hands to the pump'.

We know that 1992 will start as a tough year, but the investments we have made in developing both our products and all our processes which present and sell and deliver those products to our customers, will stand us in good stead.

I wish all of you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Best Regards,
Sam Wauchope

Sam



Kevin Coleman, Product Manager for the A5000, at the product launch

A5000 launch is a sell-out

What a launch it was! The response from everyone – the press, dealers, educationalists and the general public – was phenomenal. The first production run of nearly 5000 computers is completely sold out and demand continues to outstrip supply.

At 12 noon some 30 key members of the press attended parallel presentations at London's Churchill Hotel and at Swynford Paddocks. This was followed by a similar show to key dealers in the afternoon.

The impressive set and innovative slide show on 'Cable News' – due for release in December – nearly outclassed the occasion's star, the A5000 itself. The presentation included a twenty-minute demonstration of the A5000's new RISC OS3 operating system. Reactions were unanimously favourable, with widespread disbelief that the £1499 price really did cover everything including the multi-scan monitor specially tailored to Acorn's specification.

Mike O'Riordan, Kevin Coleman, Brian Salter and Terry Shurwood all gave talks, while TV and radio personality Barry Took was invited to give the after-dinner speech that evening.

The next week was one of hectic activity for the forty or so people taking part in the nationwide roadshow – Monday, Edinburgh; Tuesday, Manchester; Wednesday, Cardiff; Thursday, Heathrow. Guests arrived at 10am for a full day of demonstrations and hands-on opportunities lasting until 4.30. Then it was into the coach for the next venue, followed by building the next set into the early hours of the following morning.

Barely a week after the main launch and roadshow came the BBC ACORN USER SHOW. Over 10,500 people attended and at one stage there were so many people inside, the organisers had to call a halt for safety reasons. Another measure of the show's success was given by the exhibitor who told us that he had recouped the cost of attending before lunch on the first day.

For Acorn, the show was the platform for launching the A5000 to the general public. A pantechnicon outside the exhibition centre was stocked with 250 computers for sale to visitors – expected to be enough to last the three days. They were sold out by 11am on the first morning and further supplies lasted only until the end of the day. No-one could have foreseen the fight on the forecourt over the last machine!

To thank all those involved in this most successful launch, everyone who took part was invited to the Prince Albert pub in Quy for a well-deserved celebration.

Acorn set to enter CD ROM market

Acorn Replay CDs

Looking just like an audio CD, a CD ROM can hold up to 600 Mb of data, or the equivalent of the entire *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* at a fraction of the cost normally associated with such a volume of information.

The application potential is enormous. Already there are about 2000 CD titles available, the majority having been developed for the PC market. An industry standard now exists which means existing Archimedes users will be able to access these, either directly or via the PC emulator, in addition to those currently being developed specifically for the Archimedes range.

A recent Department of Education and Science initiative is encouraging schools to make use of CD ROM drives by investing an estimated £4 million next year on providing CD ROM drives free on request to schools. Malcolm Bird and his Technical Division team have been working hard over the last few months to ensure that we have the systems and support available in early 1992 to take full advantage of this market where we are already so well established.

Many different types of CD ROM titles exist from the most basic which contain libraries of data or clip art in various formats for importing into DTP documents to those offering more sophisticated images and audio clips. A particularly exciting aspect of CD ROM technology, and the one on which we have concentrated much of our development work, is the incorporation of full motion video (FMV).

This has great educational potential enabling, for example, pupils working on a project about African wildlife not only to read all about lions and hear them roar but also to see them roaming the African plains. The Acorn Replay CDs coming out next year will allow just that. We will be giving demonstrations at the BETT Show and from feedback so far, expect the response to be very favourable. ■

Acorn *Replay*

New-style manufacture for the A5000

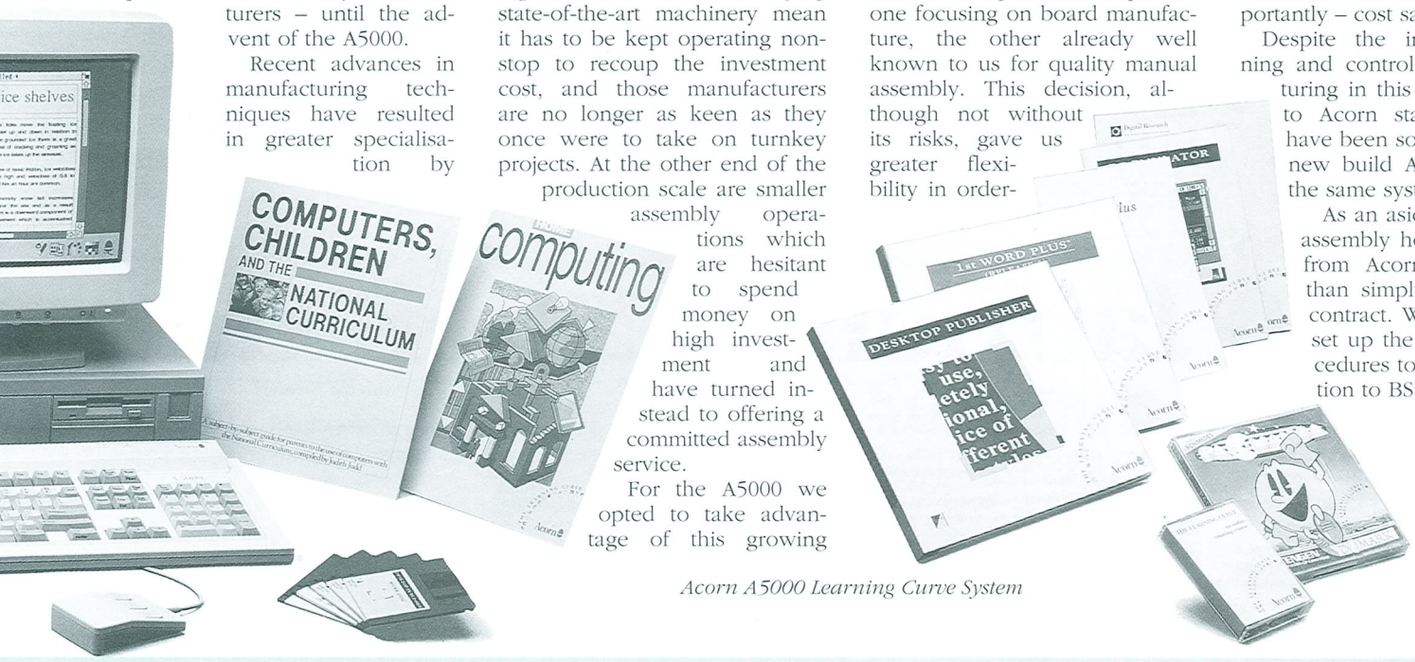
Acorn has always subcontracted production to turnkey manufacturers – until the advent of the A5000.

Recent advances in manufacturing techniques have resulted in greater specialisation by electronic subcontractors. The high sums involved in buying state-of-the-art machinery mean it has to be kept operating nonstop to recoup the investment cost, and those manufacturers are no longer as keen as they once were to take on turnkey projects. At the other end of the production scale are smaller assembly operations which are hesitant to spend money on high investment and have turned instead to offering a committed assembly service.

For the A5000 we opted to take advantage of this growing split and subcontracted production to two specialist companies, one focusing on board manufacture, the other already well known to us for quality manual assembly. This decision, although not without its risks, gave us greater flexibility in ordering different configurations for different markets and – most importantly – cost savings.

Despite the increased planning and control that manufacturing in this way has given to Acorn staff, the results have been so successful that new build A3000s will use the same system.

As an aside, for the final assembly house, the order from Acorn meant more than simply a prestigious contract. We helped them set up the necessary procedures to gain accreditation to BS5750. ■



Acorn A5000 Learning Curve System

Quality Edge workshops given new look

About 40 staff recently spent a day at our training unit at Newmarket Road learning about our **Quality Edge** programme. The workshops, which have been substantially modified following the feedback received after the very first Quality Edge courses, were held specially for those who have joined the company within the last couple of years and therefore missed the introduction of our Total Quality Management programme.

Phil Smith, Quality Manager, and John Hammond of Management Dynamics worked together with Janet Henson-Webb and Ken Parnis to redesign the workshops. Three separate workshops were held during October. ■

Today's students are tomorrow's media barons

Tomorrow's media barons are in good hands, judging by the award-winning newspaper standard set by primary school students in a South Australian country town.

Years 6 and 7 students from Memorial Oval Primary School in Whyalla, 400km north of Adelaide, won first prize in the junior category of classroom newspaper in *The Advertiser's* Newspaper in Education Award last month (October).

Open to students in years 5 to 12, the competition attracted more than 1,200 entries from over 150 schools in South Australia.

'The whole operation has been very business-like, from assigning various students to specific tasks – like reporters, chief editors or printers – right through to the content and style of the publication.

'The children even set up their own company to run the newspaper and issued share certificates for working capital', Mr Russell, the acting Principal, said.

The school uses Acorn Archimedes A3000 systems with a variety of desktop publishing software including Acorn's View word processor and Draw for graphic design.

It is one of three Archimedes the school operates on an Econet network of 16 machines which include Acorn BBC Master 128 and Compact computers used for a variety of educational applications.

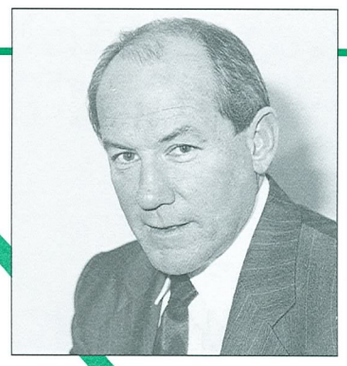
'The other Acorn machines are also used in the newspaper process to key in the copy from the reporters. The stories are then saved onto the network's hard disk and transferred to the Archimedes for processing into the newspaper format using the desktop publishing program, Impression Junior.

'The school newspaper has become quite popular. It contains everything you'd expect from a community paper – topical issues relating the the seasons and current affairs as well as issues relating to happenings at school', he said.

'They must be doing something right because the newspaper shares were issued for 50 cents each, and are now worth $4.00. The kids maintain the company books as part of their mathematics class. The shares rise in value as the circulation and paid advertising increases', Mr Russell explained.

'The entries were of the highest standard we have seen since establishing this competition five years ago. The Memorial Oval Primary School won its section on a number of counts: Its use of original ideas, such as the placement of advertisements, the running of the newspaper as a real business and the selling of shares, certainly contributed to the decision', said Ms Dana Wortley, *The Advertiser's* Education Consultant. ■

New Zealand's Doug Pauling clocks up the air miles



Doug Pauling, in Cambridge to discuss next year's sales forecasts and operating budgets for Australia and New Zealand, took time out of his schedule to talk about his hectic last few months. Since May Doug was in charge of Acorn's operations in both countries pending the appointment in November of General Manager for Australia, Greg Sebire.

Doug flew to Australia for three or four days every second week. Although the flight across the Tasman Sea is three hours long, New Zealand is two hours ahead so he could catch the 7am plane from Auckland and be at Acorn's office in Sydney by 10.30. It made for a very long day, however, because he'd be getting up at 3am Australian time and often working into the evening.

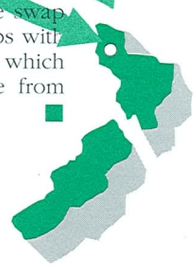
Was being away so often a problem for his family? At 17 and 20, Doug's two daughters weren't too greatly affected but, as Doug admits, it was 'getting things done around the house that suffered, as well as my social life at home – though the hospitality of the Australians made up for that! My wife was also able to join me on two occasions and used them as an opportunity to visit her relations in Melbourne which she thoroughly enjoyed.'

Australia is a very different market from New Zealand. It's a huge country with a sometimes frustratingly heavy bureaucracy. Whereas New Zealand is an open market with little government red tape, each Australian state adopts a different approach so getting things done is inherently more complicated. However, as Doug says, 'The potential is absolutely fantastic for Acorn. Greg Sebire has a really exciting job ahead and has come in at just the right time.'

The biggest immediate market is schools in New South Wales and Victoria where the Acorn name is already well respected but where schools are only just starting to buy new technology. Universities across the country are another major target area in which the A5000, A540 and Unix should do very well.

Doug wouldn't deny there are problems of course. 'Although both Australia and New Zealand are looking exciting, their domestic economies are slow and unemployment is relatively high. There's been little growth over the last twelve months and not much forecast for the next. Having said that, we've got a good image and are operating in a fairly well-defined market place. Others are having it much tougher!'

Much as he'd have liked to, Doug didn't get the chance to travel to the more exotic parts of Northern and Western Australia, his business trips being confined to Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra. Nor has he yet fulfilled his promise to himself to take advantage of his annual trip to the UK and visit more of Europe. He's especially keen to see Wales and Ireland. Maybe he'll manage it in 1993 when he hopes to organise a house swap for several months, perhaps with someone in Cambridge which he sees as an ideal base from which to explore. ■



Acorn goes transatlantic!

Acorn is now working under its own flag in Canada. In September, Acorn Computers Canada was formed in order to be able to work directly with the various school boards there. A programme of 'seeding' Acorn product into the schools has begun and is progressing very well. Behind Acorn Computers Canada are our good friends Comspec, and of course Dorothy Netherwood and Olaf Trunzer, all of whom were involved with Acorn through Olivetti. The

office is Toronto-based, which is ideal for the initial push into the south-eastern Ontario school boards.

Achtung!

Eighteen of our German dealers visited us immediately after the Acorn User Show. As you can see, most of them were still smiling – even after three hours in Unit 5!

Jet-setting to America

Acorn's technical department has been well represented at recent international conferences. In June, Mark Taunton gave a paper on RISC ix squeezing techniques at USENIX in Nashville, held in the huge Opryland Hotel and attended by some 2,000 delegates. (Apparently there were other conferences going on at the same time so it must have been a *tight squeeze!*).

More recently Ran Moklady and John Bowler flew to Monterey in California for the ACM Symposium on Open Systems Principles in October. These conferences are always good for trying to elicit inside information from the competition's delegates and exchanging new ideas yet to appear in computers.

They also provide an ideal opportunity to take a few days' holiday and see something of the States. Ran drove an amazing 3,000 miles in ten days, taking in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Arizona, Utah and Nevada, while Mark managed a more modest 1,600 miles touring round West Virginia and the Blue Ridge Mountains with his family and staying with friends in New York and Washington.

Acorn gives to charity

A total of £700 was donated to charity following a recent sale of obsolete equipment. The money was split as follows:

Red Cross Society £200
MENCAP £200
The British Computer Society (Disability Programme)..... £100
The National Council for Special Education £100
British Blind Sport £100

International events held recently

22-24 November 91
HCC Show
Utrecht, Holland

10 December 91
German Press Conference
Munich

New Names, New Faces

Peter Bondar –
Group Product Manager

Jan Burge –
Payroll Officer/Cashier

Gary Hawkins –
Storesperson

Sharon Holmes *(Student Placement)*
Sales and Marketing, Consumer

Michaela Parfitt –
Ledgers Supervisor

Paula Whitehead –
Receptionist, Fulbourn Road

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Which event would you like to help with?

5-8 December 91
Computer Shopper
Wembley

14 January 92
Special Needs Open Day
at Nanhurst School

22-25 January 92
BETT Show
Barbican

5-7 March 92
Education Show
NEC

15 March-5 April 92
Ideal Home Show
Earls Court

10-11 April 92
APPLY IT
Stirling

12-14 April 92
European Computer Trade Show
Business Design Centre

Software goes festive

Towards the end of every year the software companies introduce a selection of new titles – especially games – to coincide with the Christmas demand. Of particular interest this year are two Christmas discs offered by Northwest SEMERC. Their Phases 2 Christmas disc costs £7.50 and provides a variety of picture-writing screens, Christmas artwork and language activities to help children design and print their own cards, thank-you letters, etc.

A range of Concept keyboard overlays is also provided with stand-alone overlay modules for uses with Phases or any other RISC OS packages. The Genesis Christmas Disc (also by Northwest SEMERC and costing £7.00) helps you to write your own Christmas story to the sound of your favourite Christmas carol.

Contributions to 'Comment' via E-mail

Produced by DCN Associates, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk